

For: WCLV PROGRAM GUIDE

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THIS MONTH'S COVER

"Head of a Young Man", red chalk drawing heightened with white chalk, by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (Italian, Venice ca. 1696-Madrid 1770). Courtesy, The Cleveland Museum of Art, The Charles W. Harkness Endowment Fund.

This drawing, an 8-3/4" by 6" work which hangs in the Museum's gallery A, was executed by the extraordinarily deft hand of Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Tiepolo was the prolific genius of 18th century Italian art and is said by some experts to be the greatest artist of that century and the last great Italian painter.

The gallery A drawing (together with the balance of Cleveland's great drawing collection) is complemented by a loan of twenty-one Tiepolo figure drawings which appear with eighty-five other works by master artists of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries in a special traveling exhibit, "Italian Drawings from the Art Museum of Princeton University". The exhibition is in gallery 27 and may be seen through February 25.

The drawing on the cover reveals the brilliant draughtsmanship Tiepolo achieved in this medium as he did in pen and wash drawings. He had a mastery over dazzling light, an unbounded technical skill and he attended to detail with such virtuosity that it became his unique contribution to make pertinent detail an integral part of a whole composition. His predecessors had also perceived and employed detail in their works but with them it was a distribution rather than a concentration of ideas.

(6) Princeton Drawings Coll.
Catalog

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References: (1) E117567 Tiepolo + His Contemporaries Met.
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All of Tiepolo's inventive power can be discerned in his drawings which, in many cases, were studies for fresco paintings. Others seem to have been done just for the joy of seeing how many variations could be squeezed out of a single subject. With his pen and wash drawings (many of this medium are in the exhibition) the white paper becomes the lights and a bistre or sepia wash serves for the brief shadows. Each motif Tiepolo executed fits perfectly within the rectangular limits of the page; and the line of each motif was so quickly and exquisitely drawn, the washes so transparent and luminous that a dazzling sensation of forms moving in light is created. Tiepolo learned from Guercino (also represented in the exhibit) and Dürer but his mastery was his own. Only Rembrandt's drawings produce the same vibrant pattern of light and dark and although Tiepolo's draughtsmanship lacks the deep, suggestive quality of Rembrandt's it is in some cases more powerfully abstract.

Gifted as he was with a highly decorative talent, Tiepolo was dedicated to painting sumptuous decorations. He never had an equal in ceiling painting and the amount of wall-space he filled with magnificent frescoes is remarkable as is the work he poured forth in the form of altarpieces, etchings and finished sketches.

Tiepolo's father was a prosperous Venetian ship captain and merchant of marine goods who had five other children in addition to Giovanni. At about the age of 25 the artist married the sister of the celebrated painter Francesco Guardi and had nine children of his own; two sons became painters (six of Domenico's drawings are in the current Museum exhibition) and the youngest child was an engraver. Tiepolo worked mostly in Italy but also had commissionings in Würzburg, Germany and Madrid, Spain, where he died and was buried.

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